

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEF SECURITY THREATS TO CANADA'S 44th ELECTIONS – UPDATE

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE CANCELLATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S RALLY IN BOLTON ONTARIO, 27 AUGUST 2021

This assessment is intended to provide situational awareness on a specific public order event where suspicion of criminality occurred and where there were concerns for public safety. The information in this assessment is based on reporting from the RCMP Combined Intelligence Group, security and law enforcement partners, searches against RCMP holdings, and open source resources (information current as of 31 August, 2021). Assessment updates shall be provided throughout the election period on a weekly or as required basis.

KEY POINTS

- There has been a noted escalation in hostility specifically directed towards the Prime Minister's (PM) campaign events.
- There have been no indications of ideologically-motivated violent extremism (IMVE) or credible, overt threats of violence, however. Protestors have predominantly focused on anti-lockdown/anti-mask rhetoric.
- Current anti-vaccine themed protests directed towards the PM are likely also attracting individuals that are not aligned with any specific ideology or group, but who have experienced personal hardships due to COVID-19 which they perceive are due to the Liberal government's response to the pandemic.
- The RCMP and Police of Jurisdiction continue to expect a more concerted effort to demonstrate, which will be difficult to avoid given that rallies are planned and publicized by the media in advance.
- Though a rally may get cancelled, there still exists the threat of conflict between Liberal Party supporters and an increasingly frustrated protest population.
- Anti-vaxxers and those against pandemic health measures are more likely to publicly mobilize than those who respect certain protocols, which means more demonstrations are probable.

PURPOSE

To provide information on the events that led to the cancellation of the PM's speaking event on August 27, 2021 in Bolton, ON, and to provide a brief overview of the current campaign protest climate.

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BACKGROUND

On August 27, 2021, the PM was scheduled to meet with supporters at 1700hrs at the Hampton Inn parking lot in Bolton, ON. The event was cancelled by the Liberal Party due to security concerns for Liberal supporters amongst those in attendance at the rally. Prior to this, the PM attended scheduled campaign events in Mississauga and Nobleton, ON – each one meeting increasingly hostile behaviour. A high level summary of event issues that day is as follows:¹

Nafisa Middle Eastern Restaurant, Mississauga, ON

- A small number of vocal anti-vaccine protestors appeared prior to the motorcade arriving for this event. The Liberal Party initially planned to hold the event outside but later moved it inside.
- The PM was heckled upon arrival. When the PM exited the site after meeting with local residents, protestors followed, continuing to heckle the PM.
- The group size was less than seven in total.

St. Phillip Bakery, Nobleton, ON

- Protestors gathered around the business in small numbers but quickly grew in size. The group was loud and yelled anti-Trudeau obscenities.
- Anti-vaccine groups held flags, banners, and used bullhorns, pushing, yelling and surrounding the restaurant in the parking area and sidewalks. The group pushed towards the PM's bus and circled it upon its arrival.
- Protestors aggressively moved toward the windows of the bakery, attempting to block the entrances to the campaign event site. Protestors yelled through the glass windows of the bakery when the PM entered. One female pounded on the bakery window.
- Protestors attempted to push forward toward the PM as he exited the site and boarded the bus.
- The group size was approximately 200 in total.

Hampton Inn, Bolton, ON

- A number of the same protestors from the bakery in Nobleton were observed at the event.
- Very aggressive behavior was observed, with people swearing at the PM with signs and flags.
- A rope line separated the protestors from the campaign site, but part of the rope was taken down by the protestors.
- Several of the protestors used large pocket knives to cut down the Liberal election signs which had been attached to fencing by plastic wire ties. The signs were trampled and thrown into dumpsters.
- The event was cancelled by the Liberal Party due to safety concerns for Liberal supporters at the rally, which included families and children. Protestors grew even more upset at news of the rally cancellation.
- The group size was at least 400 in total.

During these events, security was not compromised. It appears that there were no formally organized open source protests advertised in advance of the events. There had been some chatter online on forums and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and s.37 indicating that people would attend Liberal campaign events to protest, although no overt social media threats were detected prior to the event.

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ASSESSMENT

Based on available information, anti-vaccination sentiment is the current focus at the majority of Liberal campaign events. Anti-vaccination sentiment is also the current focus of weekly protests opposed to public health restrictions which have occurred throughout Canada since April 2020. These weekly protests had previously focused on anti-lockdown/anti-mask rhetoric and attract people who would be generally inclined to defy health restrictions.

Protestors at these events have included people with a variety of grievances, including those who have had a visible presence at protests in previous years advocating for positions considered to be anti-immigration and anti-Muslim in nature.

The IMCIT assesses that the current anti-vaccine themed protests directed towards the PM are likely also attracting individuals that are not aligned with any specific ideology or group, but who have experienced personal hardships due to COVID-19, which they perceive are due to the Liberal government's response to the pandemic. Although protests of this nature have been sustained throughout the pandemic nationally, Ontario has been one of a few provinces where protesters have been very vocal, which could be in part due to the duration of various periods of lockdown within the province. It is assessed that core themes will vary across provinces.

Peaceful protests are a Charter-protected right, but recent media attention focusing on the cancellation of the August 27 Liberal campaign rally, as well as the reported hostile nature of an August 29, 2021 protest in Cambridge, ON is leading to amplified discussion, by protesters and the media, about protests at future Liberal campaign stops. It is possible the increased media coverage, coupled with event delays and cancellations, may embolden individuals to continue to protest PM events across Canada to express a variety of grievances.

As for all Party leader events, campaign stops continue to be publicized on mainstream media beforehand, which increases the opportunity and likelihood for protest activity which could increase over time. It is expected the PM will be met with protests as in-person campaigning continues. Recent public order events like those on August 27th and 29th demonstrate the ability of protesters to mobilize with little notice beforehand.

While the IMCIT has no information indicating that protesters or protest organizers are overtly advocating for violence, there is increased social media discussion in general about the tense nature of recent protests, and interest in protesting at Liberal campaign events in the future. It is highly likely that future disruptions will continue to drive discussions on social media dedicated to anti-vaccination rhetoric, which could increase the likelihood that individuals motivated, in whole or in part by this ideology, may attend.

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Although the majority of Liberal Party campaign protests have been anti-vaccination in nature, there have also been protests to express other grievances. As examples:

- On August 19, 2021 in Victoria, BC, protesters expressing concerns over “stolen land” stood in front of the PM’s bus.²
- On August 24, 2021 in Vancouver, BC, protesters against old growth logging in Fairy Creek mobilized outside of a hotel where the PM was believed to be staying.³

Liberal Party campaign events continue to generate the majority of protest discussion online, however news reports indicate that the NDP Leader has had a racist remark directed towards him while campaigning⁴ and a Calgary Conservative MP has expressed concern about recently being aggressively approached while out in public and has received threats by phone.⁵

The RCMP and Police of Jurisdiction continue to monitor and assess such threats and engage with security and law enforcement partners as required. The IMCIT will provide threat assessment report updates as required.

Distribution List

RCMP, s.37 [REDACTED]

Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)

Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence

¹ PROS #2021-1258375

² https://twitter.com/BezirganMocha/status/1428465681066909699?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1428465681066909699%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rebelnews.com%2Ftrudeau_campaign_bus_blocked_by_indigenous_protesters_on_vancouver_island

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/protesters-vancouver-trudeau-1.6152313>

⁴ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-jewish-liberal-candidates-ndp-leader-jagmeet-singh-face-racist-attacks/>

⁵ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8148942/canada-election-trudeau-event-protesters/>